

Three good things... on a plate

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Grilled figs with marsala
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How often have you wished there was a magic formula to simplify cooking? Well, there is. Put three good things together on a plate and, somehow, the whole is always greater and more delicious than the sum of its parts. Think scones with jam and cream, fish and chips with mushy peas, or porridge with golden syrup and cream.

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The magic number

The best meals are often the simplest, using just three basic elements, says **Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall**

 If you ever feel your cooking is stuck in a rut, then the simple recipes in my new cookbook, *Hugh's Three Good Things*, are for you. I hope to set you off in a fresh creative direction, with a radical new perspective on cooking.

This is not about exotic ingredients, trendy techniques or shunning certain foods, but rather about recognising a simple pattern that already underpins many well-loved dishes. A couple of years back, I realised that so many of the recipes I was creating at home, and indeed many that I was enjoying cooking or eating from other writers and chefs, had something in common. They were little more than three good things on a plate.

Scallops, bacon and pea puree; asparagus, goat's cheese and olive oil; tomato, avocado and mozzarella; rhubarb, crumble and custard; even humble jacket potato, baked beans and grated cheddar ... They all work, don't they?

Of course, you can't just throw any three ingredients together and expect an instant hit. But neither is it necessary to be a professional chef to make this simple approach work. The key is to combine flavours and textures so that each ingredient shines and somehow tastes more "of itself". Landing on a winning combination is pretty instinctive. Listen to what your tastebuds tell you, and you will be very much on the right track.

I would like to offer just a few cautions. First, don't go mad. Sweet, salty and bland is a great guiding principle, but it doesn't always work ... try chocolate and taramasalata pancakes.

Second, the quality of your raw materials is everything. There's no phonebook-length list of ingredients to hide behind with this kind of cookery, so vegetables and fruit need to be at their freshest and/or ripest, while cheeses, fish and meat must be of the highest quality you can find.



Third, let's not be too pedantic. These recipes are all based on the idea of three complementary elements in which the whole plate becomes greater than the sum of its parts. But that doesn't mean that the recipes always have only three ingredients. Far from it. In some cases, there really are no more than three ingredients, while in others, our elemental trio is glued together, if you like, by basic store-cupboard standbys. This is cooking, not

politics or religion. We need a light touch and a sense of fun. Tinkering and tweaking is wholly encouraged. Many of the best meals you'll ever eat will have some personal touch, some element of improvisation from the cook preparing them. Ready to give it a whirl? One ... two ... three ... GO!

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Eggs, purple sprouting broccoli, garam masala

This Indian spice mix is often used to add fresh, spicy flavours to a dish at the end of cooking - it just needs a touch of heat to bring it alive.

Ingredients

Serves 2

- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- About 250g purple sprouting broccoli, woody ends removed
- 50g butter
- 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, grated or very finely chopped
- 2 tsp garam masala
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Swaps

You can use standard broccoli, of course, but also other green veg. Tender young leaves of kale or cavolo nero are delicious, and green beans work well in the summer.

Method

Bring a pan of water to a rolling boil. Add the eggs, return to a simmer and cook for 6 minutes. Immediately drain and hold the pan of eggs under cold running water. This stops the eggs cooking at the right point: the yolks should still be a little soft when you cut into them. Carefully peel the eggs and set them aside.

You can either steam or boil the purple sprouting broccoli. I like to steam it as it retains a little more of its fantastic colour this way and the delicate florets are less likely to get waterlogged. Either way, cook the broccoli for 2-6 minutes until just tender. Drain if necessary.

Melt the butter with the extra virgin olive oil in a small pan over a medium heat. Add the garlic, then the garam masala. Turn the heat down low and gently cook the spicy butter for 1-2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Put the broccoli on a large warm plate, halve the boiled eggs and place them on top. Dress the eggs and broccoli with the warm, fragrant butter. Season with a little more salt and pepper and serve.



Scallops, peas, spring onions

It takes a lot for me to depart from my favourite scallop and chorizo combination, but sweet peas and spring onions are a delightful diversion.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 1 large bunch of spring onions (150-200g)
- 100g peas - either frozen petits pois or very fresh baby peas
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 12 scallops, cleaned, with corals attached if you like
- A knob of butter
- 1 garlic clove, very finely chopped or grated
- A squeeze of lemon juice
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

Nuggets of chorizo or bacon - fried until crisp before you cook the spring onions - add a fine extra element to this lovely dish.

Method

Trim the spring onions and remove the outer skin. Cut into 5mm-1cm slices, on an angle.

For frozen petits pois, put them into a sieve and pour a mug of boiling water over them.

Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a heavy-based frying pan over a medium-low heat. Add the spring onions and let them sweat gently for about 5 minutes, until soft. Add the peas and toss for a minute or two. Season with salt and pepper, remove from the pan and set aside.

Wipe the pan with kitchen paper. Add another tablespoon of oil and turn the heat up high. Season the scallops and add when the pan is very hot - they should sizzle when they hit the pan. Leave them for about 1 minute, then carefully turn one over: if golden brown, flip all the scallops over and cook until caramelised on the other side.

Reduce the heat to medium-low and return the peas and spring onions to the pan, along with the butter and garlic.

Toss, take off the heat, add a squeeze of lemon, then transfer to warm plates and serve.



Barley, onions, tomatoes

A wonderfully hearty soup, but also straightforward. If you use a little less tomato puree, you'll produce a risotto-style dish that will be delicious with some melting mozzarella stirred through, or some slivers of parmesan on top.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 2 tbsp olive, rapeseed or sunflower oil
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 150g pearl barley or pearled spelt, rinsed
- 750ml good beef or chicken stock
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the roasted tomato puree

- 2kg ripe tomatoes, halved
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- A few sprigs of thyme
- 2-3 bay leaves
- 2 tbsp rapeseed or olive oil
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Or: 750ml passata

Method

If making your own tomato puree, preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4. Lay the tomato halves, cut side up, in a single layer in a large, deep baking tray. Scatter garlic and thyme on top, tuck in the bay leaves, trickle over the oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast in the oven for about an hour, until soft and pulpy, and starting to caramelise on top. Remove and leave to cool off for half an hour or so. Tip into a large sieve and rub through with a wooden spoon. Discard the skin and pips. Your sauce is now ready to use. If you haven't produced the full 750ml you need here, increase the quantity of stock to compensate.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium-low heat. Add the onion and saute for 8-10 minutes until soft.

Stir in the pearl barley or spelt, then add the stock and 750ml tomato puree or passata. Bring to a simmer and cook very gently, uncovered. Barley should take 30-40 minutes; spelt will only need 20-25 minutes.

Season to taste, then ladle into bowls, trickle with extra virgin olive oil and serve.



Courgettes, mangetout, lemon

The crisp, sweet crunch of mangetout and vegetal bite of baby courgettes go incredibly well with the tang of citrus fruit in this lovely starter salad.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 4-6 baby courgettes
- A few handfuls of tender young mangetout, or fresh sugar snap peas
- 2 small lemons
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- A small bunch of mint, leaves only, torn
- A small bunch of dill, leaves only, roughly torn
- A few pinches of sugar
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

Garnish the finished salad with a scattering of pea shoots and/or pea or borage flowers.

Swaps

Swap oranges for lemons. Or, better still, use one of each. Try using freshly picked raw baby peas instead of mangetout or sugar snap peas.

Method

Slice the courgettes into 2-3mm-thick rounds. Strip the inside seams of the mangetout or sugar snap peas. If using sugar snaps, slice them thinly on an angle. Put them into a bowl with the courgettes.

Finely grate the zest from 1 lemon on to the veg.

Cut a slice off the base of each lemon and stand on a board. With a sharp knife, cut down through the peel and pith, slicing it away in sections. Now, working over the bowl of veg to catch any juice, slice the segments of lemon out from between the membranes into the bowl. Remove any pips as you go. Taste and squeeze out more juice from the lemon membrane if necessary.

Add the olive oil, herbs, a good pinch of sugar and some salt and pepper. Toss well, then leave to stand for 5-10 minutes.

Taste and adjust the seasoning if needed, then serve.



Squash, ricotta, ham

With its beautiful colours and deliciously varied textures, this is a lovely dish of contrasting ingredients. It's a real looker too - ideally served on a big platter in the middle of the table as a starter or component of a main meal.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 800g-1kg squash, such as crown prince, butternut or kabocha
- 3-4 garlic cloves (unpeeled), lightly bashed
- Several sprigs of thyme (optional)
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive or rapeseed oil, plus extra to serve
- 100g ricotta
- 30-40g thinly sliced parma ham or other air-dried ham
- A squeeze of lemon juice
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Swaps

For a really quick, very different dish, replace the roasted squash with slices of ripe, juicy pear.

Method

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. Peel and deseed the squash, then cut into big chunks. Put into a roasting dish with the garlic and a few thyme sprigs, if using. Trickle over the 2 tablespoons of extra virgin oil, season with salt and pepper and toss well. Roast for 40-50 minutes, or until the squash is tender and starting to caramelise, giving it a stir halfway through cooking. Discard the garlic and thyme and leave to cool completely.

Put the roasted squash on individual plates or a large platter.

Dot the ricotta over the top. Tear the ham into shreds and scatter over the squash and ricotta.

Tear the leaves from the rest of the thyme sprigs, if you have them, and scatter over the dish.

Season with pepper, salt and extra virgin olive oil. Finish with a squeeze of lemon juice, then serve.



Chicory, peaches, black pudding

This is an unusual, but very successful combination of sweet and sharp, rich and savoury, and bitter and crisp.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 1 large or 2 small heads of red or white chicory
- 4 ripe peaches
- About 400g black pudding
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- A small knob of butter
- 1 tbsp red wine vinegar
- 1-2 tsp thyme leaves (optional)
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Swaps

Apple slices, gently fried in a little butter, make an ideal autumnal alternative to the peaches.

Method

Trim the base from the chicory, separate the leaves then wash and dry. Slice the larger leaves down the middle.

Halve and stone the peaches, then cut into 5 or 6 wedges. Peel them if you like.

Remove the skin from the black pudding and break it up into large chunks. Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil with the butter in a frying pan over a medium heat. Fry the pudding until browned on all sides, allowing the edges to crisp slightly. Remove from the heat. Divide between warm plates.

Add the vinegar, remaining oil and most of the thyme, if using, to the pan and stir to incorporate the meat juices and make a warm dressing.

Arrange the peach and chicory over and around the black pudding. Trickle the dressing over everything and season with salt and pepper. Scatter over the rest of the thyme leaves, if you have them, and serve.



Brandade, tomatoes, toast

Brandade is a traditional dish from southern France: a satisfying, thick puree of salt cod, garlic and mashed potato. Salt cod needs to be soaked for about two days, but you can make a lovely, easy version of the dish using a smoked fish such as pollack or haddock.

Ingredients

Serves 4-6

For the tomatoes

- 400g smallish, ripe tomatoes
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Sea salt and black pepper

For the brandade

- 250g floury potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 25g butter
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 300g undyed smoked pollack or haddock fillets
- 100ml milk
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

For the garlic toast

- 6-8 slices of coarse-textured bread, such as sourdough
- 1 garlic clove, halved
- Extra virgin olive oil

Method

At least 3 hours before serving, preheat the oven to 75-100C/gas low. Halve the tomatoes and lay, cut side up, in a roasting tin. Trickle with some oil and season. Bake for at least 3 hours until wrinkly, but juicy.

Put the potatoes into a pan of lightly salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 15-20 minutes until tender. Drain and leave to dry.

Melt the butter in a pan over a low heat and sweat the garlic for a minute or two. Add the smoked fish, cutting it into pieces to fit in a single layer. Pour over the milk, partially cover and simmer very gently until the fish is cooked.

Drain the fish, reserving the liquid. Return this liquid to the pan and add the olive oil and some black pepper. Either push the cooked potatoes through a ricer into the hot liquid or just add to the pan and mash.

Discarding the skin and bones, break the fish into flakes and beat into the mash. Season.

Toast the bread. Rub with the garlic and trickle with olive oil. Pile the brandade and tomatoes on the toast and top with olive oil and black pepper.



Beetroot, mozzarella, balsamic vinegar

Here, the tang of balsamic vinegar is made into a dressing with the beetroot roasting juices. A stunning visual combination - and a tasty one.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 500g beetroot
- 3-4 garlic cloves, unpeeled, lightly bashed
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- A couple of sprigs of thyme, plus extra thyme leaves to serve (optional)
- A couple of bay leaves (optional)
- 3 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 balls of buffalo mozzarella
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

You can serve this as a magnificent bruschetta. Cut the beetroot up into smaller pieces, pile it on to garlic-and thyme-rubbed toasted sourdough slices and top with the mozzarella and juices.

Method

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. Peel the beetroot, cut into thick wedges and put into a roasting dish in which it fits snugly. Add the garlic cloves. Trickle over the olive oil and 3 tablespoons of water. Season with salt and pepper, tuck in the thyme and bay, if using, and cover tightly with foil. Roast for about an hour until completely tender. Discard the garlic and herbs.

Transfer the wedges to a bowl. Drain off the roasting juices into a small pan; if very reduced, add a splash of water to the dish first and stir to deglaze. Add the vinegar to the pan and bring to the boil. Simmer until reduced by about half. Pour this syrup back over the beetroot.

Leave the beetroot to macerate in the dressing and cool to room temperature, turning occasionally. Season to taste.

Arrange on serving plates. Tear the mozzarella into small chunks and add to the plates. Finish with a sprinkling of thyme leaves, if you have them, and trickle over the remaining syrup from the bowl.



Asparagus, halloumi, new potatoes

Roast asparagus, mingled with earthy new potatoes, salty halloumi cheese and a generous squeeze of lemon, makes a fantastic early summer supper.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 600-700g new potatoes, scrubbed or scraped
- 4-5 garlic cloves, unpeeled, bashed
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 400g asparagus
- 225g halloumi
- A spritz of lemon juice
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1-2 tbsp roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley to finish (optional)

Method

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. Cut the potatoes into small chunks. Put them in a large roasting tray with the garlic, add the olive oil and some salt and pepper and toss well.

Roast for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, snap the woody ends from the asparagus and cut the spears into 3-4cm lengths. Cut the halloumi into 2cm cubes.

Take the potatoes from the oven, add the asparagus and halloumi and toss to combine. You don't want the tray to be too crowded - everything should be in a single layer. Return the tray to the oven for 15 minutes until the asparagus is tender and the cheese is starting to caramelise. Discard the garlic.

Add a generous spritz of lemon juice and toss everything again, then transfer to a serving dish. Scatter with parsley, if using, and some more black pepper. Serve straight away with wedges of sourdough bread.



Squash, coconut, chilli

You can make the dish as hot or mild as you like by adjusting the quantity of fresh chilli and curry powder you use. Go for a fairly mild variety of chilli, so you can put plenty of it in for colour and texture without blowing everyone's head off.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 800g-1kg squash, such as crown prince, butternut or kabocha
- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 onion, thinly sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2-4 mild or medium red chillies, deseeded and sliced
- 1 good tbsp of your favourite curry powder or paste
- 400ml tin coconut milk
- A squeeze of lime or lemon juice
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

Green beans, whole or cut into 4-5cm lengths, added to the curry about 8-10 minutes before the end of cooking, will add colour and texture.

Method

Peel and deseed the squash, then cut it into bite-sized chunks.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium-low heat. Add the onion and cook gently for about 10 minutes. Add the garlic and chillies and cook for another couple of minutes. Stir in the curry powder or paste and cook for a minute or two. Now add the squash, with some salt and pepper, and stir well. Cook for a further 2 minutes or so.

Pour in the coconut milk, stir well and bring to a simmer. Cover and cook gently for 20-25 minutes, stirring carefully every now and then. You want the squash to be perfectly tender and yielding, but not mushy or falling apart.

When the squash is cooked, add more salt and pepper if needed. Finish with a good spritz of lime or lemon juice. Ladle into bowls and serve with rice and/or naan or flatbreads.



Mushrooms, scone, soured cream

Pretty much a classic savoury "cobbler", this hearty vegetarian main course looks fabulous as you bring it bubbling to the table.

Ingredients

Serves 6

- 3 tbsp olive/rapeseed oil
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1 medium carrot, finely diced
- 1 celery stalk, finely diced
- A large knob of butter
- 700-750g mushrooms, thickly sliced
- 1 large garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 tsp chopped thyme
- 150ml red wine
- 250ml vegetable stock
- Salt and black pepper
- Soured cream to serve

For the scone topping

- 175g self-raising flour
- ½ tsp salt
- 75g chilled butter, diced
- 1 tsp English mustard
- 75g mature cheddar, grated
- 1 large egg
- 125ml milk

Method

Preheat the oven to 190°C/gas 5. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large heavy-based saucepan and add the onion, carrot and celery. Cover and sweat over a low heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon of oil and a knob of butter in a large frying pan. Cook the mushrooms in batches, stirring often. Add the garlic and thyme to the last batch towards the end of cooking. Add the mushrooms to the sweated vegetables.

Pour the wine into the frying pan. Stir and let it bubble for a couple of minutes. Pour over the mushrooms, then add the stock. Bring to a simmer and leave to cook.

Sift the flour and salt into a bowl, add the butter and rub in with your fingers until it resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Stir in the mustard and cheese. Beat the egg with the milk, then stir lightly into the flour mix into a soft, sticky dough. Season the stew and transfer to a wide oven dish. Drop large spoonfuls of the scone dough on to the mushroom mixture. Bake for about 30 minutes until the scone is well risen and golden. Serve with a dollop of soured cream on top.



Parsnips, shallots, puff pastry

The idea of creating a savoury tarte tatin is not a new one. However, this particular incarnation, with parsnips and shallots, is my latest favourite.

Ingredients

Serves 4-6

- 1 ready-rolled puff pastry sheet (about 200g)
- 1 tbsp olive, sunflower or rapeseed oil
- 3-4 small-medium parsnips, peeled and cut into 2cm thick rounds (about 250g prepared weight)
- 150g shallots, peeled but left whole
- 30g soft brown sugar
- 30ml cider vinegar
- 15g butter
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4. Take a non-stick, ovenproof tatin dish, 20-25cm in diameter. Roll your pastry out to about a 5mm thickness. Cut a disc of pastry the diameter of the top of the pan. Chill in the fridge.

Heat the oil in the frying pan or tatin dish over a medium heat. Add the veg and fry gently until both sides take on a nice caramel colour.

Combine the sugar and vinegar with 30ml water, then add to the pan with the butter and plenty of salt and pepper. Cover the pan tightly with foil and place in the oven.

Roast for about 40 minutes, then remove. If the syrup is looking a little dry, add 1-2 tablespoons of water and give the pan a shake.

Lay the pastry disc over the veg, tucking the edges down the side of the pan. Turn the oven up to 190C/gas 5 and bake for 20-25 minutes until the pastry is puffed up and golden brown.

Leave the tart in its dish for about 15 minutes. Then turn it out upside down on a large plate over the top and invert the plate and pan. Pour any juices left in the pan over the tart and serve.



Squid, hummus, almonds

This clever combination from Gill Meller, River Cottage head chef, makes an elegant starter or light main course. You can use shop-bought hummus, but I'd advise you to loosen it with extra lemon juice and olive oil. Better still, make your own.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- About 300g cleaned squid, with tentacles if you like
- 4 tbsp flaked almonds
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- A little sweet or smoked paprika (optional)
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the hummus

- 400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 2 pinches of ground cumin
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 3-4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve

Method

For the hummus, put the chickpeas, half the lemon juice and garlic, a good pinch of cumin and the tahini in a processor with a pinch of salt and 4 tablespoons water. Pulse to a coarse mix, then blend in 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Add more lemon juice, garlic, cumin, salt or pepper to taste. Scrape the hummus into a small pan.

Cut the squid pouches open along their length. Score the inside of the flesh in a diamond pattern. Cut each one into a few pieces. Cut the rings of tentacles in half at the base.

Warm the hummus gently, adding a little more oil and/or water, if necessary.

In a non-stick frying pan, toast the almonds over a medium heat for 1-2 minutes, tossing frequently. Remove and set aside.

Return the pan to a high heat and add the olive oil. When smoking hot, add the squid and season. Cook for 2 minutes, tossing the squid until it is opaque with patches of golden-brown.

Spoon the hummus on to warm plates, top with the squid and almonds. Sprinkle with a pinch of sweet or smoked paprika and a little more oil.



Trout, watercress, spelt

I've always loved the clean, fresh pairing of watercress and trout. Here I've added nutty grains of pearly spelt to the mix to create a smart but simple salad starter. If I can't catch my own, I always buy organically farmed trout.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 1 organic rainbow trout, about 500g, or 2 smaller fish
- ½ onion, sliced
- ½ tsp black peppercorns
- 2 bay leaves
- A few parsley stalks (optional)
- 100g pearly spelt
- 2 handfuls of young, tender watercress
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the dressing

- 50g plain yoghurt
- ½ tsp English mustard
- Juice of ½ lemon
- A pinch of sugar

Swap

Use new potatoes instead of spelt: scrub and simmer in lightly salted boiling water, cool, and cut into smallish chunks.

Method

Gently wash the fish under cold running water, lay it in a saucepan and pour on enough cold water to just cover. Add the onion, peppercorns, bay leaves and parsley stalks. Bring to a very gentle simmer and cook for 8-10 minutes. Lift out the fish and allow it to cool completely. Strain the liquid (now a fish stock) into a clean pan and return to the heat.

Wash the spelt, then add to the fish stock. Add 1 teaspoon salt, bring to a simmer and cook for 25-30 minutes. Drain and allow to cool.

Peel the skin from the trout, then carefully lift the flesh from the bones, removing any small pin bones as you go.

For the dressing, put the ingredients into a bowl and whisk well to combine. Season to taste.

Gently combine the fish with the spelt.

Divide between serving plates, scatter over the watercress and trickle over the dressing. Season and serve.



Smoked fish, spinach, bechamel

Creamed spinach - wilted, chopped and stirred into a bechamel sauce - has long been a favourite comfort food. Adding flaked smoked fish turns it into the sort of supper that will rescue anyone from the doldrums.

Ingredients

Serves 2

- 250g spinach, tough stalks removed
- 250g smoked pollack or haddock fillet

For the bechamel

- 350ml whole milk
- 1 bay leaf
- A wedge of onion
- 25g butter
- 25g plain flour
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

Top off with a poached egg or two.

Method

Wash the spinach, and place in a pan over a medium heat until it wilts. Drain, cool, squeeze out the water and chop coarsely.

Put the fish in a saucepan and pour on the milk.

Add the bay leaf, onion and some black pepper. Bring slowly to the boil, take off the heat and flip over. Cover and leave to cook in the residual heat for 3 minutes. The flesh should be opaque and flake easily from the skin. If it's not quite done, leave it for a couple of minutes longer. Remove with a slotted spoon. Strain the milk.

Melt the butter in a saucepan over a medium heat. Stir in the flour and cook gently for

2-3 minutes. Remove from the heat and add about a quarter of the warm, fishy milk. Beat to form a smooth paste. Add another quarter of the milk and beat again. Repeat with the remaining milk. When you have a smooth sauce, return it to the heat and let it simmer gently, stirring often, for 4-5 minutes. Take off the heat.

Stir in the spinach. Flake the smoked fish off the skin in large chunks, and add to the sauce. Stir gently and season to taste.



Chicken, plums, soy

Sweet plums and salty-tangy soy sauce are brilliant paired with tender chicken. Chilli and ginger are desirable, but optional. I would say the garlic is a must, though.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 8 bone-in, skin-on, free-range chicken thighs, or 1 small free-range chicken, jointed into 8 pieces
- 1 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1-4 red, mild-to-medium-hot chillies, to taste (optional)
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced and coarsely grated
- A thumb-sized piece of ginger, peeled and coarsely grated (optional)
- 8 plums, halved and stoned
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- A small bunch of coriander, leaves only, chopped (optional)
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method

Preheat the oven to 200C/gas 6. Put the chicken thighs in a roasting tray, trickle with the oil and season well. Roast for 30 minutes, turning once or twice.

Meanwhile, halve and deseed the chillies, then cut each into 1cm strips. After 30 minutes, take the chicken out of the oven and add the sliced chillies, garlic and ginger to the roasting tray. Turn the chicken again to make sure the aromatics are evenly distributed around and under the pieces. Roast for a further 10 minutes.

Tuck the plum halves around the chicken pieces and trickle the soy on top. If there doesn't seem to be much liquid in the tray, add a few tablespoons of water. Return to the oven for 10-15 minutes until the plums are soft and yielding their juices.

Baste the chicken and plums with the pan juices, then leave to rest for 10 minutes. Finish with a scattering of chopped coriander, if you like. Serve with noodles or plain rice.



Bacon, radicchio, shallots

This wonderful combination of sweet, salty and bitter flavours makes a rich and delicious lunch for a cold day. You will find the radicchio darkens considerably when cooked, but don't worry, it tastes fantastic.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 500g shallots or baby onions
- 200g thick-cut streaky bacon
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- A couple of sprigs of thyme (optional)
- 1 radicchio
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Plus one

If you want to be a little bit greedy, pour a good trickle of double cream over the finished dish and flash it under a hot grill for a few minutes until bubbling.

Swaps

If radicchio is hard to come by, a couple of heads of chicory will do equally well. Cut them in half, rather than into wedges.

Method

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. Peel and halve the shallots or onions, or quarter them if large. Put the shallots in a large roasting tray with 2 tablespoons of olive oil, the thyme if using, and some salt and pepper. Toss well and roast for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, cut the radicchio into 6 or 8 wedges, keeping the stalk end intact. In a large bowl, toss the radicchio wedges with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil and some salt and pepper. Cut each bacon rasher into 4 or 5 pieces.

Add the bacon and radicchio to the shallots. Roast for a further 25-30 minutes, giving it a stir about halfway through, until the radicchio is soft and wilted and the bacon and shallots are nicely caramelised.

Serve hot, with plenty of bread for mopping up the juices.



Pork, potatoes, apples

Pork and potatoes with apple sauce is, of course, an all-time classic Sunday roast. Here the same ingredients are combined in a much quicker way for an easy weeknight supper – or an effortless weekend feast.

Ingredients

Serves 2

- About 500g fairly floury potatoes, such as King Edward or Maris Piper
- 3 tbsp sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil, plus extra for frying
- 2 dessert apples
- 2 pork chops
- 8–10 sage leaves
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Swaps

This works very well with lamb chops instead of pork, and plums in place of the apples. Leave out the sage, but put a pinch of ground cinnamon on each plum half as you add them to the roasting spuds.

Method

Preheat the oven to 200C/gas 6. Peel the potatoes and cut into 2–3cm chunks. Put into a saucepan, cover with cold water, add salt and bring to the boil. Simmer for 5 minutes, then drain and return to the pan. Add some salt and pepper. Put the lid on the pan and give it a good shake to roughen up the potatoes.

Put the oil into a large roasting tin and place in the oven for about 5 minutes until hot. Add the potatoes, toss in the oil and roast for 30 minutes.

Now quarter and core the apples, cutting each quarter into 2 or 3 wedges. Add to the potatoes and stir. Roast for another 10–15 minutes until the potatoes are really crisp and the apples are soft.

While the potatoes and apples are roasting, heat a little more oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Season the chops and add to the pan. Fry until nicely coloured and cooked through, adding the sage leaves for the last few minutes.

Nestle the cooked chops into the cooked potatoes and apples and leave in a warm place to rest for 5–10 minutes. Serve with a green vegetable such as kale or cabbage, or a leafy salad on the side.



Rice, saffron, tomatoes

A golden, saffron-infused risotto and intense, oven-roasted tomatoes look stunning together on the plate. The flavours complement each other extremely well too, with the delicate, floral bitterness of saffron beautifully offsetting the sweetness of the tomatoes.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- A little rapeseed or olive oil
- 25g unsalted butter, plus extra to finish
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- About 800ml chicken or vegetable stock
- A large pinch of saffron strands
- 250g risotto rice
- 150ml dry white wine
- A bay leaf and/or a sprig of thyme (optional)
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the roasted tomatoes

- 500g small or medium tomatoes
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sugar

Method

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas 5. For the roasted tomatoes, lightly oil a medium roasting dish. Halve the tomatoes or cut into quarters, and place in the dish. Scatter the garlic and lots of salt and pepper on top, then trickle over the olive oil and sprinkle on the sugar. Roast for about 30 minutes.

For the risotto, heat a dash of oil with the butter in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion and saute gently until soft. Put the stock and saffron in another saucepan and bring to a simmer, then keep warm over a low heat.

Add the rice to the onions and stir for a minute or two. Pour in the wine and cook until absorbed, then add the bay leaf and/or thyme. Now add the stock, a quarter at a time, keeping the rice at a low simmer, stirring often. Let each batch of stock be absorbed by the rice before you add the next. Continue until creamy, 20-25 minutes. Take off the heat, dot with butter, cover and leave to rest for a couple of minutes.

Remove the bay leaf and/or thyme, fork through and season to taste. Spoon into warm bowls and top with the juicy roasted tomatoes.



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For the risotto, heat a dash of oil with the butter in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion and saute gently until soft. Put the stock and saffron in another saucepan and bring to a simmer, then keep warm over a low heat.

Add the rice to the onions and stir for a minute or two. Pour in the wine and cook until absorbed, then add the bay leaf and/or thyme. Now add the stock, a quarter at a time, keeping the rice at a low simmer, stirring often. Let each batch of stock be absorbed by the rice before you add the next. Continue until creamy, 20-25 minutes. Take off the heat, dot with butter, cover and leave to rest for a couple of minutes.

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Polenta, blue cheese, greens

Hearty, comforting and filling, this simple threesome is just the ticket on a chilly day. If blue cheese doesn't appeal, use a soft goat's cheese instead.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 400g spring greens, kale or cavolo nero
- A large knob of butter
- 200g fairly soft blue cheese, or goat's cheese, crumbled into small chunks
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the polenta

- 400ml milk
- 1 bay leaf
- $\frac{1}{2}$ onion
- A sprig of thyme (optional)
- 150g quick-cook polenta
- 20g butter

Method

Put the milk for the polenta in a saucepan along with 400ml water. Add the bay leaf, onion, and thyme if using. Bring to a near-boil, then take off the heat and set aside to infuse for 20 minutes.

Strip the spring greens or kale leaves away from their stalks. Roll the leaves up and slice across them to produce thick ribbons. Steam them for about 3 minutes, or simmer in salted water for just 2 minutes, until tender, then drain well.

Squeeze or press the greens in the colander to remove as much water as you can. Toss with the knob of butter and some salt and pepper and keep warm.

For the polenta, strain the infused milk and water into a clean pan. Bring to a simmer, then stir in the polenta in a thin stream until the mixture is smooth. Return to a simmer for just 1 minute, then remove from the heat. Stir in the butter and season generously with salt.

Scoop the soft polenta into warm bowls. If it starts thickening, loosen it with a splash of hot water. Top with the cheese and put a heap of buttered greens alongside. Grind over some pepper and serve.



Apricots, tea, mascarpone

A lovely recipe from my collaborator Nikki Duffy. The fragrance and delicate, tannic bitterness of Earl Grey tea makes it a good foil to the rich sweetness of dried apricots. A dollop of creamy, sweetened mascarpone turns the aromatic fruit compote into a satisfying pudding.

Ingredients

Serves 6

- 250g organic dried apricots, halved
- 500ml hot, strong Earl Grey tea
- 200g mascarpone
- 20g icing sugar, or to taste
- A splash of cream (optional)

Plus one/swap

You can use other dried fruit as well as, or instead of, the apricots - try prunes, sultanas or figs.

Method

Put the dried apricots into a bowl and pour the hot tea over them.

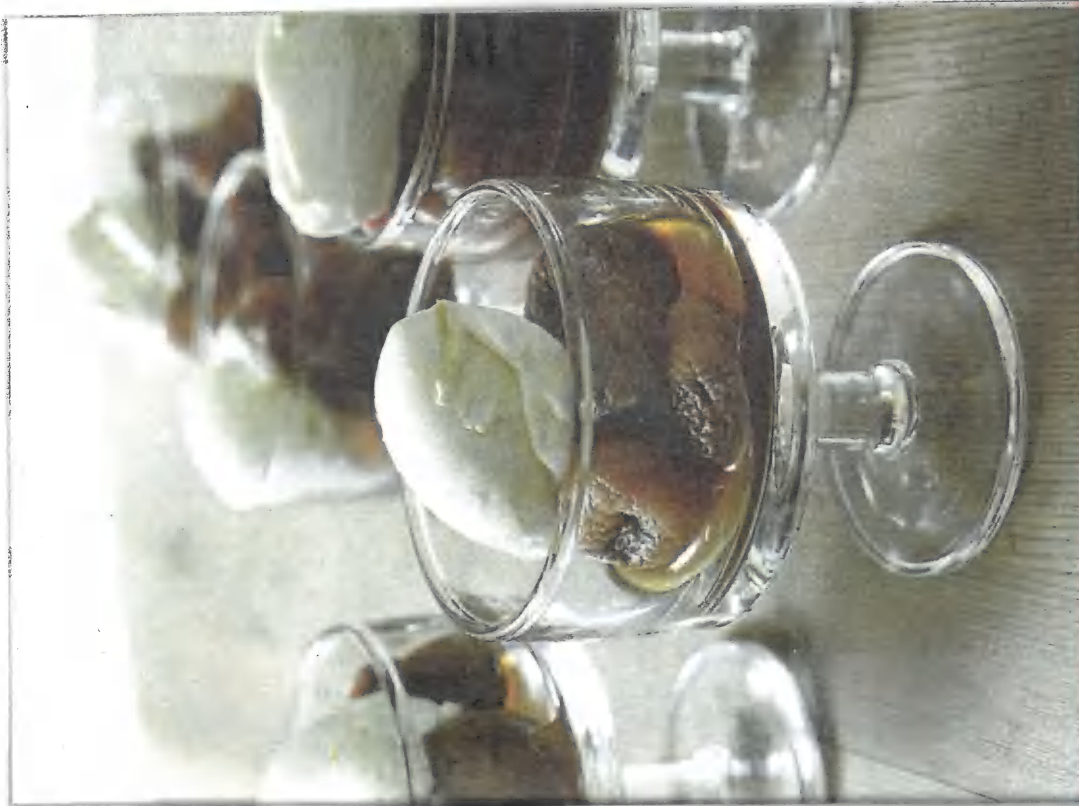
Leave to soak for at least 6 hours; overnight is ideal.

Drain off the liquid that remains into a small saucepan and boil until it has reduced by about half, then pour this light syrup back over the apricots. Leave to cool, then cover and refrigerate.

Leave in the fridge for several hours at least, or up to 2 days. The apricots will become even more plump and juicy as they soak.

Beat the mascarpone with the icing sugar until smooth. If the mixture becomes unmanageably stiff, thin it down with a splash of cream or a trickle of the tea liquor.

Serve the apricots, chilled, in glass dishes, with the syrup trickled over and a dollop of sweet mascarpone on top.



Meringue, coffee, blackcurrants

Here, sweet meringue is tempered by bitter coffee and spiced up with tart, fragrant blackcurrants. A dollop of smooth cream wraps it up nicely.

Ingredients

Serves 4

For the coffee meringue

- 2 egg whites
- 100g caster sugar
- 1 tsp very strong espresso coffee (or 1 tsp instant coffee dissolved in 1 tbsp boiling water)

For the blackcurrant sauce

- 500g blackcurrants
- About 75g icing sugar, to taste

To serve

- 125ml double cream

Method

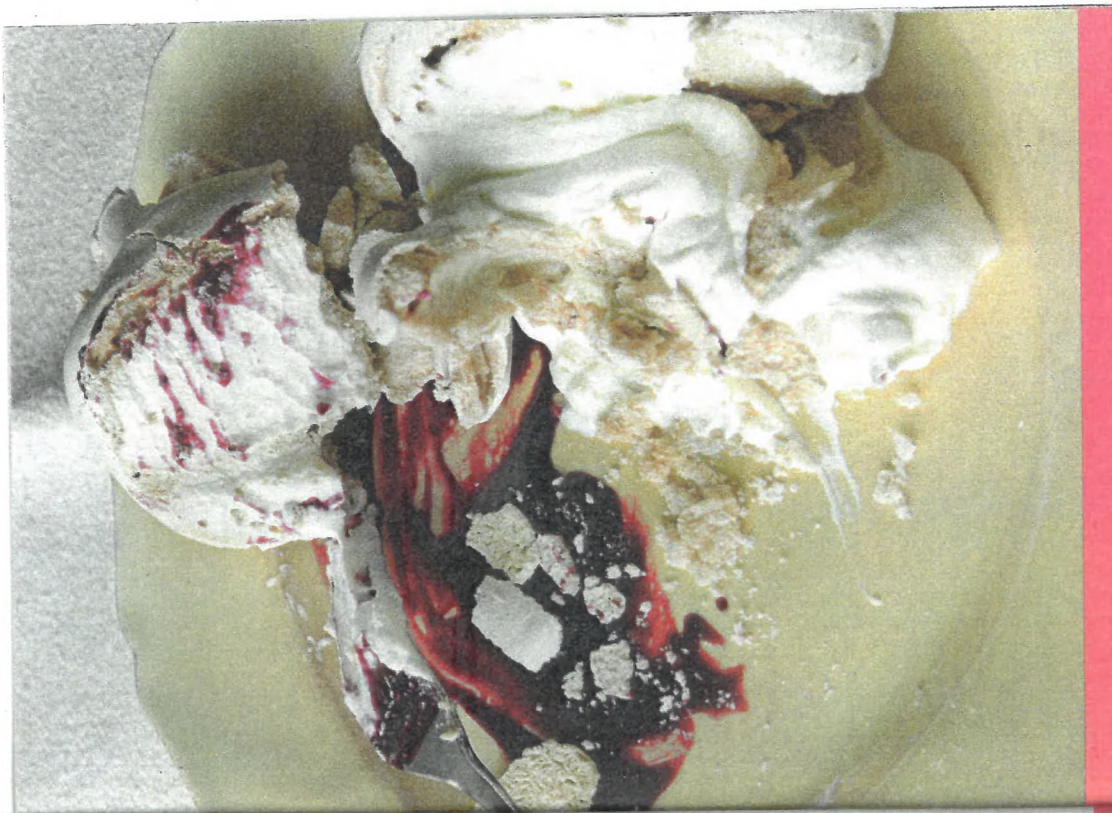
Preheat the oven to 120C/gas ½. Line a large baking sheet with baking parchment.

Put the egg whites in a clean bowl and whisk until they hold soft peaks. Add the sugar, a couple of spoonfuls at a time, whisking well after each addition. The mixture will become thick and shiny. Keep whisking until the meringue holds firm peaks. Carefully fold in the coffee.

Spoon the meringue on to the lined baking sheet in 8 equal swirls. Place in the oven for 1½–1¾ hours, until the meringues are light and crisp on the outside (and a touch gooey in the middle). Remove to a wire rack and leave to cool.

Meanwhile, for the sauce, put the blackcurrants into a pan with 50ml water and cook for 10 minutes or so. Rub through a sieve into a bowl, using a wooden spoon. If the puree seems very thick, add a little more water. Sweeten to taste with icing sugar, then chill until needed.

When you're ready to serve, whip the cream. Sandwich the meringues together in pairs with spoonfuls of cream and place on serving plates. Spoon over some of the blackcurrant sauce.



Pears, custard, ginger

The sweetness of ripe pears is always good when spiked with ginger, and this recipe delivers a spicy triple-whammy: the ginger is used to flavour the pears as well as a rich custard, while a chunk of ginger cake turns the whole thing into a gingery, trifle-ish delight.

Ingredients

Serves 6

- 250g ginger cake
- 4 ripe pears
- 2 balls of preserved stem ginger in syrup, plus 2 tbsp of the syrup from the jar

For the custard

- 200ml whole milk
- 300ml double cream
- 50g caster sugar
- 2-3 tbsp syrup from the ginger jar
- 1 heaped tsp cornflour
- 4 large egg yolks

Swaps

For a slightly less gingery pud, replace the cake with crumble topping. Sprinkle on top of the custard and pears, rather than in the bottom of the bowls.

Method

Start with the custard. Pour the milk and cream into a saucepan, bring to a simmer, then remove from the heat.

Put the sugar, ginger syrup, cornflour and egg yolks into a bowl and whisk until well combined. Pour on the hot creamy milk, whisking as you do so to keep the mixture smooth. Pour into a clean saucepan.

Cook gently, stirring all the time, until the custard thickens. Don't let it boil or it will split. Pass the custard through a sieve into a bowl and cover with cling film or greaseproof paper to stop a skin forming. Leave to cool completely.

Cut the ginger cake into 6 equal slices. Place each one in a glass serving dish. Pour the ginger custard over the cake and chill in the fridge to allow the custard to set.

Peel, quarter and core the pears. Cut each quarter into roughly 1cm cubes. Finely chop the stem ginger and add to the pears with 2 tablespoons of ginger syrup. Stir together.

When you're ready to serve, spoon the gingery pears and their syrup on to the custard.



Ricotta, honeycomb, hazelnuts

Honeycomb is honey in its purest form, untreated and pretty much as the bees intended it. The idea is to eat the whole thing, comb and all.

Ingredients

Serves 4

- 100g hazelnuts, skin-on
- 250g ricotta
- 200g honeycomb

Swaps

You can use a thick, rich natural yoghurt instead of the ricotta, or plain fromage frais.

Method

Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4. Spread the hazelnuts out on a baking sheet and toast them in the oven for about 5 minutes, until they are lightly coloured and their skins are starting to split.

Tip them on to a clean tea towel, fold the towel over them and give them a vigorous rub. This will remove most of the skins - don't worry if a few bits remain.

Divide the ricotta between shallow serving bowls. Break or cut your honeycomb into 4 roughly equal pieces and place on the ricotta, trickling over any honey that has escaped from the comb. Scatter over the hazelnuts and admire the irresistible tripartite simplicity of what you have just compiled.



Chocolate, prunes, brandy

Little chocolate fondants - oozy-middled chocolate puddings - are divine, if somewhat ubiquitous these days. I love the combination of chocolate, prunes and brandy, so I doctored the original idea a little. Timing is important here, but you can prepare them in advance.

Ingredients

Serves 6

- 100g prunes, roughly chopped
- 40ml brandy
- A little cocoa powder for dusting
- 150g dark chocolate, broken into small pieces
- 150g unsalted butter, diced, plus extra for greasing
- 3 large eggs
- 75g caster sugar
- 35g plain flour

Swaps

Soak raisins in whisky, dried cherries in calvados, or even dried cranberries in vodka to replace the prunes in brandy.

Method

Soak the prunes in the brandy for at least 2 hours. Preheat the oven to 200C/gas 6 and heat up a baking tray. Butter 6 dariole moulds well and dust with cocoa.

Melt the chocolate and butter in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water. Stir gently and leave to cool a little.

Beat the eggs and sugar together with an electric whisk for at least 5 minutes until the mixture is thick and moussey.

Fold the melted chocolate and butter lightly into the egg mousse.

Sift in the flour over the mixture, then fold it in carefully - don't overwork the mix. Carefully fold in the prunes and brandy.

Divide the mixture between the moulds. You can prepare the puds ahead to this point, if you like, and refrigerate them for up to 2 hours.

Bake on the hot tray for 10-12 minutes. Turn out immediately into shallow bowls and serve at once, with chilled cream.

